

Testimony on SB212

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee

On behalf of the 4,500 members of World Wildlife in Montana I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. WWF opposes the bill as written, but believes that with appropriate amendment it would support a vote to pass this bill out of committee.

A statewide management plan for bison is needed. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has the appropriate management expertise to develop such a plan, and the outreach capability to engage the citizens of Montana to do it. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has, in fact, been working on such a plan for over a year, and if the result of this bill encourages completion of this plan sooner all the better. Moreover, the issues discussed in Section 3 have been addressed in other management settings and WWF will be happy to share those agreements with FWP to assist them in negotiating these considerations with neighboring land owners.

WWF objects to the language in Section 6, however. As written, this section would prohibit transplant only if no other use were negatively affected. The introduction of any new land use will have some impact, even if infinitely small, on the existing suite of land uses. We are not aware of any impact requirement for any project of any type that imposes a zero-threshold impact before going forward. The better standard is that the impacts be identified, and appropriate mitigation be addressed as is consistent with Montana law.

WWF therefore suggests that the Section be eliminated or reworded as follows:

The department may not release or transplant wild buffalo or bison on state or federal land in Montana if the unmitigated impacts of the relocation or transplantation would substantially impair ~~negatively affect~~ any existing multiple use of the land, ~~including livestock grazing.~~

Second, WWF is concerned that there are bison owned by the state that currently need to be released from quarantine prior to completion of this plan. The committee should consider a waiver or other bypass to avoid a situation where those animals are left in statutory limbo while the plan is completed.

Thank you.